**Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet**

Online Version: https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/peace-corps-helps-fill-gaps-guatemala

# Peace Corps Helps Fill Gaps in Guatemala

Alene Seiler

Peace Corps Response Volunteers and local farmers in Guatemala discuss the benefits of good agricultural practices.

Smallholder farmers in Guatemala often face problems such as droughts, slim profits and eroding soil, but some of them have been able to step up to such challenges by being active members in farmer organizations that have received support from the Asociación Agroexportadores de Guatemala (AGEXPORT) and Peace Corps Response Volunteers working under Feed the Future.

Peace Corps Response Volunteers in Guatemala are vital to food security efforts. Supported by USAID as part of Feed the Future, Response Volunteers spend six months to one year working strategically to fill gaps in the food security programming of local, USAID, and Feed the Future partners.

**Improving Yields with Innovative Water Filters**

Because of a string of droughts, subsistence farmers in a rural community of Totonicapan were achieving sub-par yields at harvest time. Without water, farmers could not grow crops, and resulting food shortages were damaging the health of farming families. To address this issue, a farming cooperative, Asociación de Desarrollo Integral Nueva Alianza, requested support from Peace Corps Response Volunteer Colby Branch of Hastings, New York. He worked with them to introduce devices that take the greywater from basins in the home, where people bathe or wash dishes and laundry, and filter it so that it is fit to water gardens and increase the food supply—even amid drought. The filters run not on electricity but on gravity. As cooperative members adopted this technology, they reported higher yields in their family gardens.

**Paving the Way to Increased Profits with Good Agricultural Practices**

For members of another cooperative, the Asociación de Productores de la Hacienda (ADPRA), the challenge has been to increase the profitability of their production of green beans and snap peas by qualifying the crops for export. To qualify, they must first adopt practices that meet the global Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) standards for certification. They had

adopted some of these practices but had yet to take up others.

ADPRA Founder and President Nicolas Us Tum, AGEXPORT Extension Agent Carlos Carrillo, and Stephen Oliver, a Peace Corps Response Volunteer from Portland, Oregon, conducted a project to implement improved practices that the members hadn't yet adopted. They trained more than 30 producers in five communities in practices that ranged from the safe use and disposal of agrochemicals to improved techniques for preventing soil erosion. As a direct result of the project, 16 producers now have agrochemical storage facilities, four have permanent agrochemical disposal containers, seven have field latrines, five have agrochemical mixing areas, and 36 have personal protection equipment for applying agrochemicals. Also, ADPRA now has a small plant nursery to provide seedlings that will be used in live barriers for soil conservation. Through this project, ADPRA members made further progress toward GAP certification.

**Fighting Soil Erosion with New Conservation Techniques**

For members of the Asociación Rabinal Vargas (ARV), who make their living growing peas for export to Europe, the challenge is soil erosion. They farm on small and steeply-pitched plots where an inch of rich soil, after taking many years to form, can swiftly wash away in a single rainstorm. Social conservation practices provide a solution, but farmers have been reluctant to adopt these practices given limited growing space.

Now, however, market forces are turning the tide. To keep business going with their buyer-exporters, ARV members must bring their practices into line with global GAP standards, including soil conservation practices.

ARV asked Peace Corps Response Volunteer Alexa Weiss, from Cincinnati, Ohio, for help to initiate soil conservation practices. Together, they piloted the use of contour infiltration ditches and live barrier planting. On the pilot plot, they planted chia and black beans. ARV's board of directors was happy with the results after they saw for themselves that such practices are not hard to implement and do not appear to reduce the amount of space for crops.

What's more, Weiss and her AGEXPORT colleagues applied for a small grant through Feed the Future. With this support, principal producers in ARV learned and implemented soil conservation practices on 1.3 additional acres of land. Using their plots as models, they will teach these practices to other members, and as they are adopted, the association will improve its certification status and also conserve that vital inch of soil that might otherwise wash away.

*AGEXPORT is a partner to two major Feed the Future projects in Guatemala—the USAID Guatemala Rural Value Chains Project and the USAID Western Highland Integrated Program. For more information about the Peace Corps Response program, visit* ***http://www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/response/****.*